



## The Eastern White Pine: A (re)Source of Controversy

Jason Chan



Centuries ago, the Eastern White Pine was a dominant tree species that towered over the forests across North America; reaching heights of 50-57 metres. But at the same time, the monumental tree has also reached great depths, establishing deep roots in the history of North America.

Stepping back into the 1700's, the Europeans began their venture over to North America. At the time, Great Britain ruled over the seas with the Royal Navy, but to keep such a name, they relied on the building and production of ships. The task was made easy when they discovered the magnificent white pines. The wood was light, durable and resistant to decay; it was perfect. So they saw, and they took. An uncountable number of trees were taken down; in fact, the ideal



trees (which have a 24 inch diameter) were marked with the "King's Broad Arrow Symbol" indicating that they were reserved for Europeans only. The trees were so important that by 1722, a law declared that cutting down any marked trees would lead to a fine of fifty to a hundred pounds (\$80-\$170 Cdn). Sources claim that while those living in the north compiled peacefully, their neighbours south of them didn't. The Americans had used the trees for their own living and profit, and so trees with the symbol were illegally cut down. They tried to hide their actions by making marks on other trees.

The increasing tension led to the Pine Tree Riot of 1772. The British, noticing that "their" marked pines were being cut down and used by others, issued a search in sawmills for their trees. Fines were given out to some in New Hampshire, in towns Goffstown and Weare, but the story goes that only those in Goffstown paid. Those from Weare, on the other hand, caused a riot upon arrest, assaulting the officials with whips, and humiliating the officers by shaving the manes and cutting the ears off their horses. It is thought that alongside the tea act from 1773, this pine riot contributed in fuelling the American Revolution. The conflict between Great Britain and the Americans eventually boiled over, culminating in the American War of Independence (1775-1783).

However, back up north, the waterways along the Ottawa Valley quickly became a main mode of transport for the logs. Log drivers became known for their acrobatic dances as they helped channel the resource down the rivers, so much so that even a song was written about them -

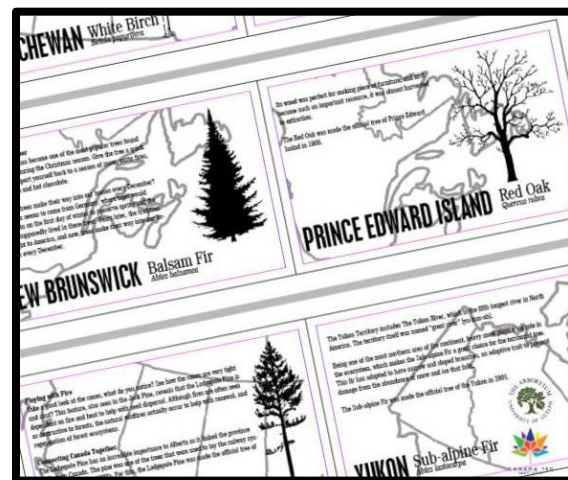
The Log Driver's Waltz (you can listen to it here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upsZZ2s3xv8&feature=youtu.be>). And as logs floated down the waterways, the pine trees began to disappear from our forests. But thankfully, some of the original giants are still around - some that were missed by the Europeans, and some that are protected in Algonquin Provincial Park.

The White Pine finds a place in the folklore of the First Nations people as well, being known as the Tree of Great Peace for the Haudenosaunee people. Legend tells of how five warring nations were united under the Eastern White Pine, represented by the bundle of five needles on the pine, as they put down and buried their weapons to live in harmony with one another.

But the original role of the Eastern White Pine before its industry days was its contribution to the biodiversity of its surrounding environment. Its seeds and bark are consumed by browsers and songbirds, soaring raptors build their nests within its foliage, raccoons and woodpeckers find shelter in cavity holes, and even bears and their cubs take refuge by climbing up the towering giants for safety. As our cities develop, we must not forget this original significance of the white pine, and the significance of natural areas in general, because once they're gone, they're gone.

In 1984, The Eastern White Pine was officially named Ontario's provincial tree. The great pine that stands in our forests now also stands in our textbooks, as a home to wildlife, a symbol of peace, and a (re)source of controversy.

The Arboretum is also very excited to announce that this summer, for Canada's 150th anniversary, a new sign series highlighting the provincial and territorial trees of Canada will be released and displayed on the grounds. Stay tuned!



---

This article was written for our April 2017 e-newsletter.

To subscribe or see the complete newsletter and other newsletters please visit our website at:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/arboretum/educationandevents/enewsletter.shtml>

---